

CONVERGE COVID-19 Working Groups for Public Health and Social Sciences Research

Research Agenda-Setting Paper

This paper was written to help advance convergence-oriented research in the hazards and disaster field. It highlights areas where additional research could contribute new knowledge to the response to and recovery from the pandemic and other disasters yet to come. Questions about the research topics and ethical and methodological issues highlighted here should be directed to the authors who contributed to this paper.

Working Group Name:

Community Resilience and COVID-19

Working Group Description:

How are resource-poor communities in three distinctly different regions of the United States responding to the COVID-19 pandemic? What can be done to address root causes and prepare for future global change? This Working Group involves researchers—in Puerto Rico, Juneau, Alaska, and Wards 7 and 8 in Washington, D.C.—working together to better comprehend the social, policy, information, and community competence factors that impact resilience. We are paying particular attention to access to healthy and nutritious food among other determinants of community resilience.

Priority Research Topics and Specific Research Questions:

Priority Research Topics	Potential Research Questions
1. The impact of the COVID-19 crisis on local government.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How have local governments adapted to the crisis? • How did they change their structure and staffing to meet the needs the pandemic required? • Were the changes short-term to address the immediate need or did they take into account how to address future concerns as well?
2. The effectiveness of communications during the crisis.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did local authorities communicate about the crisis to encourage citizens to change their behaviors? • Who were the audiences of the communications? • What platforms and techniques did the authorities use? • How did social groups react and what kinds of communications did they adopt in response?
3. Community self-organization during the pandemic.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did community groups self-organize themselves during the pandemic? • Did they work with the local authorities or act independently? • Did they work with the private sector? • Were their efforts effective? • How did previous self-organization efforts support efforts to organize during the pandemic?

4. Food access and distribution during the pandemic.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did underserved communities have access to nutritious and healthy food during the pandemic? • Did the government provide aid that was helpful and supportive of local businesses? • How did local groups organize in the food space?
5. Comparative responses to the pandemic.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which of the three underserved communities were able to most effectively maximize available resources? • What factors affected performance the most—e.g., political, social, economic?

Ethical / Methodological Considerations:

A key question for social scientists working with human research subjects is how to conduct research in crisis conditions. The most important objective is that research efforts should keep the interests of the local population as the foremost priority. The research should seek to identify best practices in responding to the pandemic, respect local voices, and be sure that outside researchers are closely coordinating with locals to ensure that the research is focused on the issues that really matter.

In crisis conditions, the people we want to interview are often pressed for time and dealing with trauma. Obtaining meaningful consent may not be easy. It is also important to have a good knowledge of local conditions.

Crisis communications play an important role in efforts to deal with the crisis. There is a lot of incorrect information circulating about the pandemic and leaders need to identify ways to make sure that people have the facts. Evidence from past infectious disease outbreaks shows that simple interventions with correct information do not always work and we need to find the best ways of communicating with members of the public. Effective research can make a real contribution in this area.

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